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# Grandma Pulls the String


by

Edith Barnard Delano

and

David Carb

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*A Comedy in One Act*

By //  
EDITH BARNARD DELANO  
and  
DAVID CARB

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GRANDMA PULLS THE STRING





## GRANDMA PULLS THE STRING

SCENE: *The Cummings's living-room.*

TIME: *An evening in winter.*

GRANDMA BLESSINGTON is conveniently deaf, hearing only what she cares to hear—a fiction which the family maintains. She is distinctly the head of the family, and as the head of the family she insists that everything be done right. Which is to say, what she considers right. Grandma may seem to be aggressive and obtuse at times, but her meddling never really hurts anyone, and she gets a deal of fun out of it.

MRS. CUMMINGS, although she has gone through a similar experience two years before when Nona became engaged to George Beaver, is in no way annoyed or bored by the repetition. She has but one desire: to do everything she can for Julia. Of course, Julia is very young and William is not much older and they have plenty of time; but as soon as William is strong enough he is going back to a very good job, and the two are sweet together, so gay, so shy—She does wish Nona would be more sympathetic, and she does wish she could get Hildegarde to bed. Above all, she wishes there were some way to keep Grandma from meddling in.

HILDEGARDE is eleven or twelve years old, and she has begun to explore life—that is, she is reading all the love stories she can get hold of and she adores the movies. This evening she is dwelling and reveling in real romance: her sister Julia's "beau" is coming, and if things are managed properly "something" ought to happen. Hildegarde intends that something shall happen, if she can help things along. Ordinarily, older sisters are rather a nuisance; but tonight—

JULIA has known moments when she longed to drown the family,—you know what families are! Julia knows Bill Thornton cares

for her and she is even surer that she loves him; if he were to propose to her, she wouldn't hesitate to say "yes." As a matter of fact, she longs for him to propose; but she does wish all this getting engaged stuff were not so complicated and didn't involve so many people; and she wishes the family would let her alone. However, Bill is to call this evening, and as he is leaving town tomorrow and he and she will have a few last hours together, that is all that really matters. Except her old coat.

NONA is the oldest of the three Cummings girls. She is twenty-two, has been married almost two years, and so knows all there is to know about getting engaged and married—in fact, all there is to know about life. She will tell you so herself—although not directly; she is too blasé for that. A shrug expresses Nona's state of mind. As for Julia and young Thornton, her attitude is: of course girls get all flustered by such a perfectly natural thing as a proposal, but when they acquire a little more experience they will see how utterly natural and commonplace the whole business is.

WILLIAM THORNTON never dreamed, when he came to this town to recuperate, that he would meet The Girl. But he did. And now he has to go back home to the job, and having been away from it for two months, heaven only knows when he will be given another vacation. And their two towns are too far apart to make visiting over the week-ends possible. And he never could write letters—they never say what he wants them to. So this evening will be the end, unless—

The Cummings living-room is plain, simple, cozy. In the rear is a door to the hall, from which the staircase mounts. At the right end of the hall is the outer door, at the left the dining-room; neither is visible. At the left of the living-room a fireplace contains gas logs. On the right are two windows, with a large sofa beneath them. There is a round center table, on which stands an electric lamp connected with the electrolier above. Chairs, ornaments, family photographs—the usual accessories. A mirror is over the mantel.

The curtain rises on an empty stage. There is no light in the room itself, but enough comes from the hall to dissipate the dark-

ness. Voices are heard—members of the family talking together, and calling from the dining-room and from upstairs.

Presently HILDEGARDE descends importantly. She stands a moment regarding the room—the unromantic room. Then she switches on the table lamp and looks about her again critically. She lowers the window shades, drops the curtains over them, fluffs up the one cushion on the sofa. And then a new idea comes to her. She carefully places the cushion on the floor beside the sofa. She kneels on it.

HILDEGARDE. Miss Julia, beautiful lady—[*She sighs fervently, rises, and once more regards the room critically. This time the light seems wrong. It ought to be soft and romantic, but she doesn't know how to make it so. She shades it with her little blue handkerchief, but the effect is neither warm nor romantic. She looks about, then goes to the fireplace and lights the gas logs, switches off the lamp, and once more kneels on the cushion.*] Miss Julia, beautiful lady, fairest lady of my dreams—[*She sighs ecstatically. The doorbell rings. HILDEGARDE does not heed it.*] Fairest lady of my dreams, I humbly beg you to accept my unworthy hand in the bond of holy matrimony and be mine. [*Once more the doorbell rings—this time peremptorily. HILDEGARDE jumps to her feet, somewhat bewildered, snapped out of an absorbing vision.*]

GRANDMA. [*From off stage*] Isn't anybody going to open the front door?

HILDEGARDE. [*Calling*] I will, Grandma.

[*She goes out. A door opens and closes.*]

NONA. [*Outside*]. Hello, dear. Where's everybody?

HILDEGARDE. Upstairs.

[*They come to the threshold of the room. NONA is wearing a handsome fur coat.*]

NONA. [*Calling*] Ooo-oooh!

MRS. CUMMINGS. [*From upstairs*] That you, Nona?

NONA. What are you doing?

MRS. CUMMINGS. Come on up.

[Nona starts for the stairs.]

HILDEGARDE. Sister Nona, come in here a minute!

NONA. In the parlor?

HILDEGARDE. [*Nodding*] I want to ask you something.

NONA. Why the heavy darkness? [*She moves towards the lamp.*]

HILDEGARDE. Oh, don't! I—don't you think the darkness is—nice?

NONA. Why yes! As darkness goes. But what's the idea?

HILDEGARDE. It's so—romantic!

NONA. Romantic—! You darling child, what on earth—

HILDEGARDE. It makes the room seem like a love bower.

NONA. A love—! Why, Hildegard!

HILDEGARDE. [*Proudly*] I fixed the lights this way!!

NONA. You! *Your* love bower!!

HILDEGARDE. [*Impatient with her denseness*] Of course not! Not mine! Julia's.

NONA. Julia's! Soft lights—where's the music?

HILDEGARDE. [*Solemnly, rather regretfully*] There isn't any music.

NONA. Do you mean to say Julia is staging—?

HILDEGARDE. Sh—sh—! Julia doesn't know anything at all about it.

NONA. Then wh—

HILDEGARDE. [*Blurting it out*] She's dressing up in a brand-new blue chiffon she and mother made today, and the lace handkerchief Grandma gave me and Mother's amber beads and the silk stockings you gave her for Christmas, and she's got new slippers with silver buckles on them, and she's got a new vanity case that looks like solid gold and—

NONA. Hold on—hold on! What's it all about? What's Julia dolling up that way for?

HILDEGARDE. Mr. Thornton got well quicker'n he thought he would and he's got to go back home to Springfield tomorrow, and

this is his last night here and we think he'll ask Julia's hand in marriage—

NONA. Ask Julia's hand—! Oh—oh— [*She bursts into laughter.*]

HILDEGARDE. Sister Nona! Don't—don't—

NONA. Ask Julia's hand! [*She continues to laugh.*]

HILDEGARDE. Well, that's what gentlemen do when they propose!

NONA. Who told you so?

HILDEGARDE. I *know* it.

[*A pause. NONA stares at HILDEGARDE, bites her lip.*]

They kneel down and beg— —

NONA. Kneel down! You Victorian child—!

HILDEGARDE. [*Pointing*] He'll kneel on that very cushion. I put it there so's he could.

NONA. [*Laughing*] Oh, my dear—my dear—my dear—! What on earth makes you think he'll kneel?

HILDEGARDE. [*Proudly*] Mr. Thornton is a gentleman. He will do it the way a gentleman should.

NONA. And so you arranged all this—this scenery.

HILDEGARDE. [*Hurt*] I wanted to help.

Lives of great men all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime!

NONA. Longfellow! My stars! [*To HILDEGARDE*] So you turned the lights out and—

HILDEGARDE. And put the cushion on the floor, so he won't get his trousers dusty when he kneels at her feet.

NONA. They still grow that young! [*Gathering the child in her arms*] You darling! Men don't kneel any more.

HILDEGARDE. Men *do*! And Mr. Thornton will. Because that's the right way to do it.

NONA. How do you know he'll do it at all, standing or—kneeling?

HILDEGARDE. [*Importantly*] Oh, we *know*.

NONA. Did he broadcast his intention?

HILDEGARDE. Of course not.

NONA. Listen, dear. That's not the way it's done. The man says, "Gee, you look good to me!" And the girl says, "What d'you say we hitch up?"

HILDEGARDE. [*Squirming out of her sister's embrace*] They don't! They don't!

NONA. Nowadays they—

HILDEGARDE. [*Defiantly*] They kneel at their ladylove's feet and pray her—

NONA. What a picture! [*She laughs.*] Imagine him—Poor Julia!

HILDEGARDE. I hate you!

NONA. Why, Hildegard—!

HILDEGARDE. Nothing is sacred to you! You make fun of everything sacred. I—I hate you! [*In tears, she is running from the room. Nona switches on the table light.*]

[*Mrs. Cummings descends the stairs rapidly and enters, stopping*  
HILDEGARDE.]

MRS. CUMMINGS. Why, baby! Crying?

HILDEGARDE. Nona makes fun of everything sacred and—

NONA. But I'm married.

HILDEGARDE. I don't care! When a thing's beautiful and lovely it's—it's lovely whether you're married or not.

NONA. Love isn't lovely when you've been married awhile. [*She is delighted with her own cynicism.*]

MRS. CUMMINGS. Nona! [*Nona grins and shrugs.*]

[*To Hildegard*] There, baby dear, don't cry. Sister doesn't mean a word she says.

HILDEGARDE. She's just spoiled everything for me.

NONA. Well, it's not spoiled for Julia. And after all, this is her party—!

HILDEGARDE. But I wanted to help her get engaged *right*. A girl doesn't get engaged but once!

[NONA and MRS. CUMMINGS exchange smiles.]

MRS. CUMMINGS. I hope not, dear. Now run upstairs and see if you can help her.

HILDEGARDE. [*Brightening*] Oh—I'll lend her my red leather belt! And maybe— [*She mounts the stairs importantly.*]

MRS. CUMMINGS. The precious child! She takes everything so to heart!

NONA. [*Grinning mischievously*] Has the gentleman announced that he is going to snatch your second daughter from the arms of her loving family tonight, Mother?

MRS. CUMMINGS. Certainly not. Don't be absurd, Nona. But—well, after all, during the entire two months he's been rushing Julia. And I do think she's—well, fond of him. And since he has to go home tomorrow—well, there it is!— [*She has been brushing tables, straightening chairs, replacing ornaments, generally touching up the room as she chatted. Now she looks directly at NONA for the first time, and speaks as though she is glad to turn the subject.*] Why, Nona! What a beautiful coat!

NONA. [*Twirling about*] Isn't it wonderful? George made a lucky guess on the market and this is my share of the graft. I'm crazy about it.

MRS. CUMMINGS. It looks mighty expensive.

NONA. Oh, George isn't a cheap guy—when he's properly directed.

MRS. CUMMINGS. [*Wistfully*] I wish Julia had a fur coat.

NONA. She'll have a dozen—if she catches Bill Thornton. [*She takes off the coat and throws it on a chair.*]

MRS. CUMMINGS. Oh, Nona! Catches! Haven't you any illusions?

NONA. [*Shrugs and grins.*] How could I have? I've been married two years!

MRS. CUMMINGS. You grow sillier every day.

NONA. [*Swiftly embracing her mother, laughing*] Nervous?

MRS. CUMMINGS. No, tired. We made a whole dress today.

NONA. Poor little mother!

MRS. CUMMINGS. When you have a daughter of your own you'll know how it feels to—

NONA. [*Her face close to her mother's*] Is that the only reason you're—flustered?

MRS. CUMMINGS. [*Withdrawing*] What do you mean?

NONA. You and Hildegarde seem to be having a sentimental bat of your own!

[JULIA, followed by HILDEGARDE, has come down the stairs in time to hear NONA.]

JULIA. [*Speaking to NONA as to one who has been through it*] That's the right word, Nona, "sentimental." I've had to put up with this sort of thing for days! You'd think I was the ugliest duckling in the world and a million years old,—they're so overjoyed at the mere possibility of getting rid of me. There's nothing in it, anyway. Just because Bill is going away tomorrow and is coming to say good-by—

NONA. [*Patting her—and JULIA moves away from the pat.*] Don't let it get under your skin, old girl! George and I had to go through the same sort of thing.

JULIA. Hildegarde didn't sigh over you!

NONA. No. I was spared that.

[HILDEGARDE stares at them round-eyed, hurt. Older sisters are incomprehensible; but they are as they are.]  
You look lovely.

JULIA. Like me?

NONA. Peach of a dress. Men adore blue.

JULIA. [*Confidentially*] What shall I do, Nona?

[MRS. CUMMINGS is doing more things to the room. HILDEGARDE can't take her eyes off JULIA.]

NONA. Grab him.

JULIA. You too! [*She turns away.*]

NONA. He is going to propose, isn't he?

JULIA. [*Flaming out at her*] You're as big a fool as the others!

NONA. [*Ambiguously*] That's what I was led to believe.

JULIA. He's going away tomorrow and he's coming tonight to say good-by. That's all there is to it.

NONA. [*Teasing*] Nothing else?

JULIA. I did think you would understand!

NONA. [*Relenting—almost tenderly*] I do, dear—I do.

JULIA. Then for goodness' sake help me!

NONA. You seem to have more help already than you can use.

JULIA. [*Blurting out her trouble*] I want to see him alone. And Dick is studying his lessons in the dining-room, and Grandma is going to insist on coming in here.

NONA. Why? She likes the dining-room better.

JULIA. Of course she does. She always says the light is bad in here. But tonight, ever since dinner, she's been complaining—the dining-room's chilly, Dick makes her drop stitches by grinning at her—as though that doesn't happen every night! She just wants to be in here with us. And somehow she'll manage to get here.

GRANDMA. [*Off stage*] Hildegarde!

JULIA. You see!

GRANDMA. Hilde-garde! Come wheel me into the parlor.

HILDEGARDE. [*At the top of her voice*] Let Dick do it.

MRS. CUMMINGS. [*Sternly*] Hildegarde!

HILDEGARDE. What if Dick does race her old chair!

MRS. CUMMINGS. Go get your grandmother.

HILDEGARDE. I don't want to—

[*Nevertheless, she goes.*]

NONA. [*To JULIA*] Take him out somewhere.

JULIA. How can I? That dowdy old coat of mine—

NONA. He's seen it before!

JULIA. But—it's his last night.

NONA. He'll be thinking of you, not your coat.

JULIA. But his last sight of me must be—er—well, *not* a sloppy, shapeless, out-of-date, faded—

MRS. CUMMINGS. Your coat isn't as bad as all that, my dear! And what does it matter?

JULIA. It matters tremendously.

MRS. CUMMINGS. Wear mine!

JULIA. Oh, Mother!

MRS. CUMMINGS. Look what George gave Nona. [*She holds up the fur coat.*]

JULIA. Oh, how gorgeous!

NONA. Pretty nifty? He surprised me with it tonight.

JULIA. How did he know which you wanted?

NONA. Oh, I have a little way of taking him window-shopping! [*She is very proud of her foresight—she knows how to manage husbands!*]

JULIA. [*Stroking it*] A dream—A dream coat—Nona, could I? May I try it on?

[*NONA holds the coat and JULIA slips into it.*]

NONA. You look like a million dollars!

JULIA. I feel like Standard Oil! [*She twists about to look down at herself.*]

MRS. CUMMINGS. Nona, why couldn't you just let Julia wear—

JULIA. Oh, Nona! Would you? Let me wear it—just tonight?

NONA. I only got it today!

JULIA. Let me wear it tonight, Nona! One night couldn't possibly matter to you!

NONA. I wish I could, Julia. But I promised George I'd go with him—

MRS. CUMMINGS. Don't be selfish, Nona.

NONA. Is it selfish to want to wear your first fur coat yourself the first night you've got it? Why can't Julia entertain her beau here at home, like any other girl?

JULIA. You know perfectly well that Grandma is going to be in this room. And Dick's in the dining-room. And if we sat on the stairs Hildegard would be hanging over the banisters. And even Mother will be wondering what is going on and—[*She has taken off the coat.*]

MRS. CUMMINGS. No I won't, dear. I'll be in the dining-room keeping Dick quiet.

NONA. So you see! Nobody but Grandma will be in here with you. And she's deaf as a post.

JULIA. She's only deaf when she wants to be.

GRANDMA. [*Outside, testily*] Don't jiggle the chair so, Hildegarde.

HILDEGARDE. [*Loudly*] I'm *not* jigging it!

GRANDMA. What say? If you're going to wheel me at all, please wheel me right. *Whatever's* worth doing is worth doing right.

[HILDEGARDE *wheels her into the living-room*. GRANDMA'S *eyes are bright, her mouth expressive and humorous—it can smile, too, when the rest of her face is impassive and innocent as a lamb's. All the time she is being wheeled in she is calmly knitting a red sweater, with a great ball of red yarn on her lap.*]

NONA. [*Loudly*] Good evening, Grandma. [*Kisses her.*]

GRANDMA. Yes, my dear. A good deal warmer in here.

NONA. [*Louder*] How are you?

GRANDMA. Well, I don't care if he is coming. He can freeze better than I can.

NONA. [*Grinning, in her usual tone*] He won't freeze! As far as I can see, the atmosphere is going to be warm enough.

HILDEGARDE. Yes, the fire in Julia's eyes will keep him warm.

[JULIA *is wondering how much more she can stand.*

GRANDMA *glances quickly at the company, her eyes twinkling, a smile flickering on her lips. There is no doubt whatever that the old lady has heard them perfectly.*]

GRANDMA. Warm, did you say, Hildegarde? Yes, my dear, it is a nice warm color. [*She holds up the sweater she is knitting.*] Push me a little nearer the hearth, child. Fire on the hearth, fire in my lap, fire in Julia's eyes, fire in Willie's heart—

JULIA. *Don't* call him Willie.

GRANDMA. Yes, fire in Willie's heart—You'd think the house would burn up, with so much loose fire.

[HILDEGARDE is staring at JULIA—her heart is wrung for JULIA. The others look at their mother, JULIA beseechingly, NONA with a grin.]

MRS. CUMMINGS. [*Bending over the chair*] Mother dear, don't you want to come upstairs with Nona and me?

GRANDMA. [*Confidentially*] I agree with you, Juliet, Nona is *not* the same since she got married. More uppish than ever.

NONA. The old humbug! She hears everything that's said!

GRANDMA. [*Her eyes narrowing*] Seems to me she gets more selfish every day she lives. Feel sorry for her husband.

NONA [*Flaring*] He doesn't need your sympathy!

MRS. CUMMINGS. Nona! Your grandmother!

NONA. She insults me every time I set my foot in this house.

JULIA. You're not so very considerate of her, either!

NONA. Why should I be? She's an old fake, that's what she is! Pretending to be an invalid, making believe she's deaf just so we'll say things before her—

MRS. CUMMINGS. She's an old lady and she's your grandmother—!

NONA. Yes, and she never lets anybody forget it for one minute! Oh, of course Julia's always been her favorite! We all know that! [*She grabs up her coat and starts for the door.*]

GRANDMA. [*Blandly*] Going home, Nona?

NONA. Good-night, Grandma. [*She pecks at her cheek.*]

GRANDMA. [*Holding on to the coat*] My! What a fine fur coat!

NONA. [*A little appeased*] Like it?

GRANDMA. What say?

NONA. I say—do you *like* it?

GRANDMA. Must have cost a heap of money! How much did you say it cost?

NONA. I didn't say.

GRANDMA. How much?

NONA. [*Loudly*] I don't know.

GRANDMA. You'll ruin that husband of yours quicker than he can ruin himself. And they already call him Poorhouse George.

NONA. What! Who dares—?

GRANDMA. [*So innocently, her head a little on one side to get her knitting closer to the light so she can pick up a stitch*] That's what they say—

[*NONA gasps in anger, glares at the benign-looking old lady a moment, and flounces out. MRS. CUMMINGS follows. She is seen inducing NONA to go into the dining-room with her. They disappear.*]

JULIA. Oh dear! I must be a sight! Jumping around so, and everybody so cross—! Oh, I do wish I—

HILDEGARDE. [*Who has scarcely taken her eyes off JULIA*] You don't! You look perfectly beautiful. You look like a dish—dish—[*She is trying to say "disheveled," but she only mumbles the last part of the word. As JULIA stares at her she hastens to add*] You look like a—a princess.

GRANDMA. Pinched? Did you say Julia looked pinched? Come here, Julia—! Rub your cheeks, child, rub your cheeks! Your hand's cold. You ought to have a fur coat like Nona's.

JULIA. Don't I know it!

GRANDMA. Mighty cold tonight.

JULIA. It's nice and cozy upstairs, Grandma.

GRANDMA. Yes, this is a cozy room. I always did like to look at a fire. Makes me feel like a young girl again—soft and fluttery and—and sad. The way I used to feel when gentlemen came sparking me. [*She sighs lingeringly.*] Ah me—romance—there's not much romancy nowadays—!

HILDEGARDE. If she feels so romantic, why doesn't she let somebody else have a chance to get that way, too!

JULIA. Hildegard, you mustn't talk about your grandmother that way.

HILDEGARDE. I don't care! It's cruel and wicked for her to spoil your romance, Julia.

JULIA. I haven't any romance. And if I had, she wouldn't be spoiling it. And if she could spoil it, then it wouldn't be worth spoiling anyway. [*JULIA bites her lip. She is almost in tears.*]

HILDEGARDE. You could have a romance, Julia! But if Mr. Thornton doesn't get a chance to see you alone, how can he—?

JULIA. Oh, my goodness! How can he what?

HILDEGARDE. [*Solemnly*] Make you an offer. [*Ecstatically*] Oh, he's so handsome!—

JULIA. Oh my goodness, Hildegard, if you don't stop—

HILDEGARDE. No woman could resist such a beautiful man. And oh—his neckties!

JULIA. [*Still exasperated, but amused in spite of herself*] You take him, then, Hildegard! You're welcome to him! I wish I'd never laid eyes on him. I wish—[*The doorbell rings. JULIA jumps, clasps her hands together, doesn't know which way to run. She glances at GRANDMA.*] Oh—dear! [*She looks in the mirror over the mantelpiece.*] I'm a fright! Where's my vanity box? Oh—upstairs—You let him in, Hildegard! [*She rushes above.*]

HILDEGARDE. Don't go, Julia! You ought to be here when he comes in, Julia! Julia! Oh dear—! [*She starts for the door, returns, tiptoes to the mirror and fusses up her hair, starts again for the door, observes that the cushion is no longer on the floor—MRS. CUMMINGS had replaced it on the sofa. She tosses the cushion down once more, leaves it, comes back, straightens it a little, pats it. GRANDMA has been a close and interested observer of the performance—there really isn't much that GRANDMA misses.*]

GRANDMA. Wasn't that the doorbell?

HILDEGARDE. Yes ma'am. I'm going right away. Oh, my handkerchief! [*She fishes deep into her frock for it.*]

GRANDMA. Want Willie to freeze out there? Won't be able to pop the question if his teeth are chattering. Warm outside warm inside—and *not* vice versa!

[*HILDEGARDE is at the threshold.*]

Move me nearer the lamp.

HILDEGARDE. In a minute.

GRANDMA. [*Emphatically*] Now!

HILDEGARDE. [*Obeying*] Oh dear, oh dear! He'll think we don't

want him. He'll think we're trying to freeze him out! [*A horrible thought comes to her.*] Maybe he's gone!

[*The bell rings again. She dashes out.*]

GRANDMA. More thrilling to her than her own will be. Children take it hard, old folks take it smiling, and lovers take it—soft and sticky—[*With a quirk of her lips*] like molasses candy—[*Laughs tenderly.*]

THORNTON. [*Off stage*] Good evening, Hildegarde.

HILDEGARDE. [*Off stage*] Why, good evening, Mr. Thornton! How *do* you do? Please step right in and remove your coat. Let me hang it up for you. Cold night, isn't it? Walk this way, please! You want to see Sister Julia, I suppose? I think she will receive you.

[*HILDEGARDE and THORNTON enter. THORNTON crosses to Mrs. BLESSINGTON.*]

THORNTON. How d'ye do, Mrs. Blessington?

GRANDMA. [*Taking his proffered hand briefly*] What say?

THORNTON. [*Shouting*] I said, how d'ye do?

GRANDMA. No. I don't hear so well. Not in winter.

HILDEGARDE. [*Patting the sofa*] Won't you be seated, Mr. Thornton? Here!

THORNTON. If you don't mind, I'll thaw my hands a little.

GRANDMA. Cold tonight. Cold enough to freeze the heart.

THORNTON. Not the heart, Mrs. Blessington.

GRANDMA. The nose, too. [*Suddenly self-conscious, he turns to the mirror over the mantel, touches his nose. GRANDMA smiles fleetingly.*] Funny about noses! When a person's nose is blue his blood's white. And when his blood is blue his nose is white. And when his nose is red, his blood is, too!

THORNTON. [*Grinning*] You're quite a philosopher, Mrs. Blessington.

GRANDMA. I've got rheumatism.

HILDEGARDE. Are you warm yet, Mr. Thornton?

THORNTON. Considerably thawed, thanks.

HILDEGARDE. Then do come over here, please. [*With an elegant wave of the hand towards the sofa*] Please be seated.

[THORNTON *sits down*. HILDEGARDE *always amuses him*.]

THORNTON. You're looking mighty fit this evening, Mary Pickford!

HILDEGARDE. [*With eighteenth-century coyness, evidently seen in the movies*] Oh law, sir!

[*As he stretches his legs slightly, THORNTON'S feet touch the cushion on the floor.*]

Oh, don't!!

THORNTON. [*Startled*] What?

HILDEGARDE. You mustn't put your feet on that!

THORNTON. [*Embarrassed, examining his shoes*] Why—er—

HILDEGARDE. It's not there for shoes.

THORNTON. Oh, I beg pardon! I thought it was a sort of foot-stool. [*He stoops to pick it up.*]

HILDEGARDE. [*Restraining him*] No!—! I put it there, you see, for—for knees. [*He is puzzled. She interprets that as love's diffidence, and clasps her hands. Then she moves deliberately, with what she conceives as enormous dignity, to the hall and calls.*] Oh sister Julia! Mr. Thornton is in the parlor.

JULIA. Be right down.

[*Meanwhile THORNTON has regarded his knees curiously, then the cushion, then his knees again. He can make nothing of HILDEGARDE'S remark. Now she returns.*]

THORNTON. You said knees. Is it some new kind of praying cushion?

HILDEGARDE. [*Beaming*] Yes. That's just what it is! A praying cushion. Gentlemen always kneel when they pray the fair lady of their heart—

JULIA. [*Still from above*] Hilde-garde! Come here a moment!

HILDEGARDE. [*Departing*] Gentlemen always kneel when they pray the fair lady of their heart to—

[*She goes.*]

[*THORNTON'S bewilderment gradually gives way to amusement. He chuckles, looks at the cushion, at his knees, chuckles again.*]

THORNTON. [*To himself*] I wonder if that kid meant me?

GRANDMA. [*As though to herself, but quite distinct enough for him to hear*] Whatever is worth doing at all is worth doing *right*—business, housework, love-making—[*Directly at him*] Have you ever been in love, young man?

THORNTON. [*Confused*] I! Why—er—I—

GRANDMA. Ever have it so bad you got engaged?

THORNTON. Oh no! Never—never—

GRANDMA. As often as that! Tut tut! Then you ought to know how to propose *right*! They say practice makes perfect.

THORNTON. [*Louder*] I say I never have been engaged! I've never proposed to anybody in my life!

GRANDMA. My! You're quite a feller with the girls, aren't you? If an old woman may be permitted to ask—in confidence, of course—how do you usually go about it?

THORNTON. But I tell you I—

GRANDMA. Oh, come now! You needn't mind telling me, William! I've been through it myself, you know. Do you jump right in or do you lead up to it gradually?

THORNTON. [*Shouting*] But I tell you I have never proposed to—[*Suddenly realizing that his shouts can be heard all over the house, he breaks off in confusion, gets up and walks to the door, glances upstairs, crosses to the fireplace nearer GRANDMA.*]

GRANDMA. [*Placidly knitting*] Never been accepted? Why, William, I'm surprised at you! You must have gone about it in the wrong way. Which did you say was your method?—sudden or gradual?

THORNTON. [*Swallowing first, trying to pitch his voice so she but not the rest of the household can hear*] Neither, Mrs. Blessington. I never have—

GRANDMA. That's too bad. You ought to have tried the other way. Gradual. [*She sighs reminiscently, and drops a stitch, bends closer to the light to pick it up.*] Dear me! I remember so well the way my poor husband did it. He said, "Maria, I—I—" And I said to him,—and it's as true now, William, as it was then—I

said, "John, what's worth doing at all is worth doing *right*!" So he began all over again. [*She stops.*]

THORNTON. [*Still extremely uncomfortable*] Er—er—really—?

GRANDMA. [*Smiling at him benignly*] You really want to know? Now that's a spirit I approve of, William! When people really want to learn I'm always willing to help them. Mr. Blessington said, "It's a fine evening," and I said, "Yes, Mr. Blessington, very fine. Won't you sit down?" So we sat down. And then he said I was looking mighty pretty—I was wearing blue. I tell you, I blushed, when Mr. Blessington praised my looks and my blue dress. I said, "Oh, Mr. Blessington—!" Then he said he hoped my parents were well, and asked whether they were at home. I said, "Oh—do you want to see *them*?" And he said, quite excited, "No—oh no—I—I want to see you—only you—all my life, Maria! You—alone!" My heart was pounding like a drum.

THORNTON. [*Interested in spite of his embarrassment*] But of course you knew all along—

GRANDMA. I sat there and sat there, and so did he. I began to think he never would get any more out. But after a while he reached over and touched my hand. It was resting between us on the sofa.

THORNTON. [*Grinning*] By accident?

GRANDMA. I drew it away. Girls did, in those days. I murmured, "Why, Mr. Blessington!" Of course he was quite overcome with shame at his—er—boldness. He walked back and forth, reproaching himself. He said—"Pardon me, Maria, pardon me! To take advantage of your innocence! But I—I—" Then he came straight over to the sofa where I was sitting. He put his hand on his heart, and made me a bow. And then he knelt on a hassock at my feet. "Maria," he said, "I love you! Will you do me the great, the overwhelming honor of considering me an humble aspirant for your hand?"

THORNTON. [*Enormously amused*] What did you say to that, Mrs. Blessington?

GRANDMA. I remembered my bringing up. Girls did, in those days. I raised my hand—like this—as though I did not know what he meant. I said, "My hand, Mr. Blessington—?" So he had to say it the right way.

THORNTON. What way?

GRANDMA. He said—"Will you grant me the inestimable privilege of loving you and caring for you all the rest of your life? In short, will you make me the most supernally happy man on earth by deigning to become my wife?" I grew quite faint—girls did, in those days. I thought I should have the vapors. I murmured, "Oh, Mr. Blessington, this is so sudden!" And so it was done! And that's how it ought to be done, young man! [*She smiles up at him.*] Think you know how, now?

THORNTON. [*Uncomfortably*] Of course.

GRANDMA. Say it over.

THORNTON. Why—really—

GRANDMA. [*Firmly*] Say it, William!

THORNTON. [*Yielding, because he has to, but aware of what a ridiculous position he is in*] "Will you grant me the—the—"

GRANDMA. The inestimable privilege.

THORNTON. "Will you grant me the inestimable privilege of loving you—"

GRANDMA. Loving *and* caring for you. Caring is very important to a woman, William.

THORNTON. "*And* caring for you forever."

GRANDMA. All the rest of your life.

THORNTON. "All the rest of your life."

GRANDMA. "In short, will you make me supernally happy by deigning to become my wife?"

THORNTON. [*He seems to find the room very warm.*] "In short, will you make me supernally happy by deigning to become my wife?"

GRANDMA. That's right. Now the next time you propose, do it that way, and you'll get the girl.

[JULIA enters, going directly towards THORNTON, her hand outstretched. He grasps it as though it were a life-preserver.]

[GRANDMA speaks rather louder, more pointedly.] The right way—the way it ought to be done!

JULIA. Bill!—

THORNTON. Julia!—

[They gaze at each other, lost in each other. A rather long silence, while GRANDMA knits contentedly. Then she smiles a little.]

GRANDMA. Julia! Get my shawl.

[They pay no heed.]

Julia, my dear!

JULIA. [Coming back to earth] Yes, Grandma?

GRANDMA. Get my shawl.

[JULIA looks about the room, a little dazed.]

THORNTON. Let me—!

GRANDMA. It's upstairs.

JULIA. [Flashing a smile at THORNTON] Just a minute!

[She runs out, and up the stairs. THORNTON gazes after her.]

GRANDMA. She's a good girl, Julia. Though girls aren't what they used to be.

THORNTON. She's—perfect.

GRANDMA. Well. She likes to gallivant. Woman's place is in the home.

THORNTON. Woman's place is in the heart!

[JULIA flits down with the shawl, lays it across GRANDMA's shoulders.]

GRANDMA. No—I don't need it yet a while.

[THORNTON and JULIA are again lost in each other; they don't even know they are still standing.]

THORNTON. By Jove, you look lovely tonight!

[GRANDMA throws them a glance, smiles.]

That dress is a corker!

JULIA. [Laughing a little] This old thing—? Like it?

THORNTON. It's a marvel.

JULIA. Don't be silly! Mother and I made it ourselves!

THORNTON. How is your mother?

JULIA. Oh, she's all right! Want to see her?

THORNTON. I don't want to see anybody in the world but you.

[GRANDMA *has a little coughing spell.* THORNTON *looks at her.*]

Look here, Julia, isn't there some place we could go—some other room—?

JULIA. I—I'm afraid there isn't.

THORNTON. Then can't you get the old Gorgon out of here? You know she's a—

[GRANDMA *is unmoved,* JULIA *suddenly very nervous.*]

JULIA. Won't you sit down, Bill?

[*Again* GRANDMA *throws them a glance, which* THORNTON *catches.*]

THORNTON. Say, you know, honestly, she's a—

JULIA. [*Nervously, impressively, shaking her head at him, to his slight bewilderment*] Won't you sit down, Bill? Over here—!

[*They cross to the sofa and sit down.*]

THORNTON. Gosh, Julia, you knock me out, in that dress! Blue certainly is your color. You know—I'm crazy about—

[GRANDMA's *big ball of red yarn rolls on the floor.*]

GRANDMA. [*Quietly*] My yarn, William.

[THORNTON *picks it up, rolling it as he goes to return it to her.*]

Thanks.

THORNTON. [*Standing*] Say, look here, Julia! Let's go out somewhere! How about the movies?

JULIA. Oh, it's too cold.

THORNTON. I'll get a cab. Come on!

JULIA. You can't talk at the movies.

THORNTON. Most people don't know it! Please—!

JULIA. Besides—it's so dark you can't see—the person you're with.

THORNTON. [*Delighted*] Julia. [*He crosses quickly to the sofa, sits down close to her.*] Julia, you want to see me! You—

[*GRANDMA'S ball slips from her lap again and rolls almost to their feet.*]

GRANDMA. William, my yarn.

[*THORNTON'S lips compress, but again he rolls up the yarn and returns the ball to the old lady and himself to the sofa.*]

THORNTON. Let's go to a restaurant, then.

JULIA. I couldn't eat a thing.

THORNTON. You wouldn't have to. But we've just got to get away from here! Please, Julia!

JULIA. I—honestly, I can't Bill. This—this dress is too thin, and—

THORNTON. Put on another one.

JULIA. I thought you liked me in this!

THORNTON. I like you in anything, you're so—

[*GRANDMA'S ball of yarn rolls almost to their feet. THORNTON picks it up, returns it with a sort of dragged briskness.*]

JULIA. [*As he comes back*] Oh, let it stay on the floor next time.

THORNTON. You see for yourself we've simply got to go somewhere.

JULIA. But you've been sick, Bill. You ought to stay where it's warm. Do you think you're really strong enough to go back home tomorrow?

THORNTON. I've been well for weeks. I've just been staying on here because I—

JULIA. Do you still take your tonic?

THORNTON. Once in a while.

JULIA. Oh, you *must* take it regularly. Promise me you'll take it regularly.

THORNTON. Do you care?

JULIA. [*Demurely*] I'll be anxious.

THORNTON. Do you care?

JULIA. Well—I—of course I'd hate to think of your having a relapse.

THORNTON. Why?

JULIA. Oh well, I—I hate to think of anybody suffering.

THORNTON. Is that the only reason?

*[She doesn't answer. He seizes her hand. Her eyes meet his. And—the ball of yarn rolls across the floor. He kicks it viciously.]*

Damn!

JULIA. *[Laughing a little]* She's an old lady, Bill!

THORNTON. She thinks I'm a retriever.

*[JULIA has picked up the ball this time, and as she winds it towards GRANDMA she throws him a laughing look over her shoulder. She puts the ball on GRANDMA's lap, bends over the back of the old lady's chair, and speaks close to her ear.]*

JULIA. Now I warn you, Grandma, that's the last time! You be more careful! *[She kisses GRANDMA's cheek.]*

GRANDMA. *[Blandly]* Warm? Yes, it's a nice warm color. I always did like red. William prefers blue.

*[JULIA returns to the sofa.]*

JULIA. She won't drop it again. *[Picks the pillow off the floor.]* Lean forward! *[He leans towards her, and she stuffs the pillow behind him.]* Now lean back!

THORNTON. Not on your life! *[He pulls the pillow from behind him. The sight of it reminds him of something, and he laughs.]*

JULIA. What's the matter?

THORNTON. *[He drops the pillow on the floor again.]* That's the place for that! Hildegarde told me so!

JULIA. Hildegarde! *[Then, suspiciously]* What's Hildegarde been saying to you?

THORNTON. She's a funny kid! Sentimental!

JULIA. *[Alarmed]* Sentimental—!

THORNTON. And romantic as the dickens. Like your grandmother.

JULIA. Grandma!

THORNTON. They both seem to have their ideas about how things ought to be done. Some things especially. Hildegarde seems to have some sort of vague yearnings for the Sir Walter Raleigh act. Your grandmother—

JULIA. Bill, what have those two been—

THORNTON. Oh, the old lady's been telling me some yarn or other. And Hildegarde—

JULIA. Oh! This family—!

THORNTON. [*Bending closer*] Come now, Julia! Let's not pretend! What's the good of beating about the bush? They know I'm crazy about you—anybody can see that! I—

[GRANDMA'S ball rolls almost viciously across the floor and under the sofa. THORNTON is very effectively checked.]

Oh, confound it! What's the matter with her, anyway?

JULIA. Sssh!

[THORNTON stoops, cannot reach the ball, kneels down on the cushion and reaches under the sofa. Bringing out the ball, he laughs up at JULIA.]

THORNTON. Not such a bad idea this, of Hildegarde's! [*Suddenly serious*] Julia, I'm kneeling at your feet—

JULIA. Don't be absurd!

THORNTON. —where I ought to kneel! I want to kneel at your feet forever, Julia—kneel and—and adore you!

[HILDEGARDE peeks around the corner of the door. Seeing him doing it her way, she forgets discretion, claps her hands noiselessly, and jumps up and down in the opening.]

Julia, I do adore you! You know I do a—

[He sees HILDEGARDE, is overcome with confusion, gulps, stares. She dodges back, runs past the door. JULIA, following his look, sees nothing. Then she becomes concerned.]

JULIA. Bill, you are ill!

THORNTON. I don't know! No—I'm not! I—I guess I'm sort of—haunted, or something.

JULIA. Haunted—!

THORNTON. [*Desperately*] Look here, Julia, you know I love you and—

[GRANDMA jerks the string sharply. It reminds him that he has the ball in his hands. He looks at it, dazed; looks along the string, jumps angrily to his feet and stalks across to her, plumping the ball rather decidedly in her lap. He strides angrily back to the sofa.]

Get your hat and coat—!

JULIA. No, Bill. I can't go out.

THORNTON. You do as I say! I won't endure this any longer. Come on—get your coat!

JULIA. She'll fall asleep in a little while.

THORNTON. Where is your coat?

JULIA. Oh—Oh dear—I simply can't wear that coat!

THORNTON. Oh, for Gosh sake! What's the matter with your coat? Wear mine! Come on!

JULIA. [*Almost weeping*] I can't!

THORNTON. Say, is everybody crazy around here—or just me?

GRANDMA. [*Placidly*] Julia!—Oh Julia—!

[THORNTON jerks his shoulders angrily. JULIA's lips are trembling. She throws THORNTON a beseeching look which he will not see.]

Oh Julia—!!

JULIA. Yes, Grandma?

GRANDMA. Julia, did I ever tell you the story about the man who looked at the moon?

[THORNTON laughs shortly, thrusts his hands in his pockets.]

JULIA. Yes, Grandma. I know it by heart—!

GRANDMA. The man was walking in the meadows one night and—

JULIA. [*Shouting*] You have told it to me, Grandma!

GRANDMA. All right, dear—I'm going to tell it to you. Don't let yourself become so excited, Julia. This man was walking in the—

THORNTON. [*While GRANDMA is still mumbling her story*] Julia! Don't you *see* how impossible it is to stay here?

JULIA. It's just as impossible to go—!

THORNTON. [*He is standing in front of the sofa looking down at her.*] Our last evening together—and much you seem to care about it!

JULIA. Oh—I know—our last—But I—

THORNTON. [*Pleading*] Look here, Julia! What's all this mystery about going out with me? I'm not asking you to Africa or the moon!

JULIA. I'd go with you to Africa—or the moon—!

THORNTON. [*Dropping down to the sofa beside her, ecstatically*] Julia—

JULIA. [*Hastily, drawing back a little*] Oh—lots of girls are like that! A girl might go to the end of the world with a man when she—when she wouldn't go to a movie with him.

THORNTON. [*He has her hand.*] You mean you'll go to the end of the world with me—? Julia, you darling—! You—I—

[*The ball of yarn rolls yet again.*]

GRANDMA. [*Who has been mumbling her story, now is audible once more.*] And the moon was only a scarecrow grinning at him! It hadn't fallen out of the sky at all! What do you think of that, William?

THORNTON. [*Wearily, despairingly returning the ball*] Yes, Mrs. Blessington.

GRANDMA. It only goes to show that there's a right way and a wrong way to do everything; and if a thing is worth doing at all it's worth doing *right*. [*She throws him a sharp glance as he stands over her. He understands, grins a moment as it dawns on him, passes a hand over his mouth, goes stiffly across the floor, bows to JULIA from the hips.*]

THORNTON. Julia, will you do me the great honor of considering me an humble aspirant for your hand?

[*JULIA looks at him in amazement and consternation.*]

JULIA. I knew you were still sick! Lie down here! [*She gets up, and puts the pillow on the sofa as she speaks.*]

THORNTON. She's making me act like a confounded phonograph.

JULIA. [*Even more distressed*] Oh—it's too warm in here for you! Lie down. Please, Bill! Relax! Close your eyes!

THORNTON. How could I close my eyes when you're looking at me like that—the loveliest, sweetest—

JULIA. I'm going to 'phone for Dr. Hartley!

[*She starts for the door.*]

THORNTON. [*Catching her hand*] No—no—no. My darling, I've got you now—[*The ball hits his foot. He kicks it away.*]

JULIA. [*Drawing away from him*] Take it to her, Bill.

THORNTON. Not until I've said what I have to say! I've got you now and I'm never going to let you go until you promise—

GRANDMA. [*Calling, with a rising inflection*] Hil-de-garde—!

HILDEGARDE. [*Suspiciously near*] Yes, Grandma.

GRANDMA. Pick up my yarn.

[*HILDEGARDE appears, and, staring big-eyed at THORNTON and JULIA, backs with it to the old lady. GRANDMA continues oh, so kindly.*]

Sit down near grandma, dear.

[*With alacrity HILDEGARDE obeys, squats on the floor, and continues to gaze with all her eyes at the lovers.*]

THORNTON. This is too much.

JULIA. [*Miserably*] They'll go to bed soon.

THORNTON. I'll be gone sooner. [*He makes for the door.*]

JULIA. Bill—! Hildegard, Mother wants you!

HILDEGARDE. Grandma told me to stay here with her.

JULIA. I'll take care of Grandma. [*She is gently pushing HILDEGARDE out.*]

HILDEGARDE. [*In a loud whisper*] Has he done it yet?

[*JULIA gives her a shake and a push.*]

GRANDMA. [*Almost drawling it*] Put my shawl over my shoulders, Hildegard.

[*HILDEGARDE breaks away from her sister and skips over for the shawl. JULIA catches her and propels her from the room.*]

JULIA. You go right upstairs and stay there. [*She crosses the room towards her grandmother, with the shawl.*]

GRANDMA. I said I wanted Hildegarde to do it for me.

JULIA. [*Loudly*] It's her bedtime, Grandma.

THORNTON. You positively won't go out?

[*JULIA shakes her head dolefully. She is utterly miserable. So is he.*]

[*Despairingly*] Oh, well—[*He slumps down on the sofa. A long silence. At last he has an inspiration, sits up.*] Julia, come here.

[*JULIA obeys.*]

Look. She's deaf. So if we sit very close together and talk low she won't hear what we're saying.

JULIA. [*Dubiously*] Maybe not. [*But after all, she knows GRANDMA will hear every word.*] Oh, Bill, I'm so sorry this happened.

THORNTON. You couldn't help it, Julia. But you might have gone somewhere with me.

JULIA. Oh, please don't begin that again!

THORNTON. I've simply got to tell you something. I can't write it—I'm a dub at letters, and anyway—This is our last evening together. It's the last chance I'll have to say—to tell—to ask you—

JULIA [*With a quick intake of breath*] What, Bill?

THORNTON. To ask you if you will—

[*Simultaneously HILDEGARDE's curls are seen at the edge of the door opening and GRANDMA's ball rolls over to him. His tongue is paralyzed. He swallows once or twice. JULIA takes his hand.*]

JULIA. [*Desperately—she knows what has stopped him.*] What, Bill?

[*HILDEGARDE is framed in the doorway, much more excited—externally at least—than the principals of the comedy.*]

Don't mind them, Bill!

THORNTON. [*Gets up, pumps his fists up and down once or twice, presses his lips together. Then he grabs up the sofa pillow, throws*

*it on the floor again, and plumps down on his knees before JULIA. He speaks loudly.]* Fairest lady of my dreams, will you grant me the inestimable privilege of loving *and caring* for you all the rest of my life? In short, will you make me supremely happy—

GRANDMA. [*Sharply*] Supernally!

THORNTON. Make me "supernally" happy by deigning to become my wife?

[*JULIA has been staring, wide-eyed. Now at last she catches on. For a moment she and THORNTON gaze at each other, then JULIA rocks with suppressed laughter.*]

JULIA. [*Very loudly*] Sir, you do me too much honor! [*In a low tone*] Bill—!

THORNTON. [*Under his breath*] You darling! Will you—?

JULIA. [*Low tone*] Of course I will! Oh—Bill!

THORNTON. You're the most wonderful—[*Their hands together*]

JULIA. My —man!

[*An ecstatic silence.*]

THORNTON. I've just got to kiss you!

JULIA. Oh, Bill—

THORNTON. [*Glancing swiftly about the room*] You've got to come, now!

JULIA. Now I don't care how I look!

THORNTON. You look perfect to me! Gosh, I—

JULIA. Will I always—look perfect—to you?

THORNTON. Always! And a day beyond that!

JULIA. Oh, Bill!—

[*A pause.*]

THORNTON. Come on—That kiss—!

JULIA. Yes—Oh, Bill—[*They have forgotten GRANDMA, forgotten HILDEGARDE, forgotten everything in the world except themselves. They move rapidly towards the door.*]

GRANDMA. William, where's my yarn?

JULIA. Oh, bother!

THORNTON. Let *her* bother!

JULIA. [*Happily*] Yes—

[*They go out.*]

GRANDMA. [*In a rage*] Julia—! You Julia! You come right back here and pick up my yarn! Julia, come back here! Ju—lia! Ju-lia! Don't you dare go away and leave my yarn on the floor. Ju-lia! Ju-lia!

HILDEGARDE. [*Entering*] What's the matter, Grandma?

GRANDMA. You go get Julia. Tell her to come back into this room.

[*HILDEGARDE is stooping for the ball.*]

Don't you touch that! You go call Julia to come back—

HILDEGARDE. [*Solemnly*] She's engaged, Grandma.

GRANDMA. I don't care what she is! Ju—lia—!

[*MRS. CUMMINGS and NONA run in.*]

MRS. CUMMINGS. Why, Mother! What on earth is the matter? Are you sick?

GRANDMA. No, I'm not sick! I want Julia to come back into this room!

[*MRS. CUMMINGS looks bewildered, NONA stands faintly smiling.*]

HILDEGARDE. [*Very solemnly*] Mother, Julia is engaged. He knelt at her feet and he prayed her to—

NONA. Knelt at her feet! [*Laughs.*]

HILDEGARDE. He did! It was grand! It was—oh, Mother—it was—grand! He knelt at her feet and prayed her, and then they folded their tents like the Arabs and silently stole away.

GRANDMA. Bring her back here this minute.

HILDEGARDE. [*Always solemn*] They've gone out to get kissed.

GRANDMA. Ju—lia—!

[*NONA is still rocking with laughter. MRS. CUMMINGS is laughing, too, but scarcely knowing what to do.*]

MRS. CUMMINGS. Oh dear! Run, baby! Call Julia back. Grandma'll have a spell if you don't.

[HILDEGARDE goes, none too swiftly.]

She'll come in a minute, Mother.

GRANDMA. [*Her anger dropping as suddenly as it came, she begins to chuckle.*] I had to prompt him once.

NONA. Oh—poor Julia!

HILDEGARDE. [*Returning*] They hadn't gone out. They were standing close together in the vestibule.

MRS. CUMMINGS. Tell her—

HILDEGARDE. I did.

[*The LOVERS enter, very self-conscious. JULIA picks up the ball and bestows it on her grandmother's lap.*]

GRANDMA. Kiss me! [*To THORNTON*] You see, William, whatever's worth doing at all is worth doing right!

[*They grin at each other, an understanding established at last.*]

MRS. CUMMINGS. Mother, isn't it time for you to go to bed?

NONA. I know it's time for me to go home. [*She stands in front of THORNTON.*] Congrats in order, Bill?

THORNTON. [*Embarrassed, happy*] I'll say so!!

NONA. [*So blasé*] Love, and the world laughs with you—! [*Nods, smiles.*] Well, I'm going to do the right thing! Good-night, everybody! [*She goes.*]

MRS. CUMMINGS. [*Loudly*] Mother, isn't it time—

GRANDMA. I'm tired. I think I'll go to bed. Hildegard—

[*HILDEGARDE reluctantly pushes the chair. MRS. CUMMINGS follows.*]

MRS. CUMMINGS. [*At the door*] Julia—! William—

[*JULIA returns her mother's look, then turns a little away.*

*BILL goes up stage and clasps her hand. Then he grins at HILDEGARDE.*]

THORNTON. Oh—must you go?

HILDEGARDE. [*Abandoning the chair*] Oh, I could stay awhile!

[*And there is no possible doubt that she would like to—.*]

MRS. CUMMINGS. [*Firmly*] No.

[*They go out.*]

GRANDMA. [*The ball of yarn drops again, but nobody sees it.*]  
This evening has been a good deal of a strain on me—

[*HILDEGARDE wheels her out, the yarn unwinding as they progress. JULIA and THORNTON are left alone on the stage. They look at the door, at each other; then their eyes turn to the ball of yarn. THORNTON picks it up, begins winding it with a sort of hurried determination. The thread is suddenly jerked. He takes a step or two up stage, as though to restore the ball to GRANDMA. He reaches a sudden decision, stops, turns back into the room and with an angry but deliberate gesture snaps the thread.*]

JULIA. Oh, Bill—

CURTAIN

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